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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes current knowledge about single custodial fathers, and draws implications for social policy. Through a review of the literature, the following characteristics of single fathers are described: socioeconomic status, race, custody status, religion, age, employment, parental history, homemaking skills, motivation for custody, visitation rights and child support, and support systems. Research on the children of single fathers focusing on sex and age, child care arrangements, and father-child relationships is also reviewed. Existing, as well as needed, social policies which affect single-custodial fathers are discussed, i.e., custody laws and issues, child support, income support programs, child care, family counseling, mediation and conciliation services, community program development, business and industry, school systems, health care systems, and cultural messages. A bibliography is included. (WAS)

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VARIATIONS OF FATHERING: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

Single Fathers with Custody: Implications for Social Policy

by

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SINGLE FATHERS WITH CUSTODY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

Single custodial fathers are defined as those group of male parents who have physical custody of their minor children. They assume primary responsibility for child care without the assistance of a co-parent or co-habitating adult living in the family home. This includes men who have legal custody as well as those who are custodians through informal arrangements. This definition could describe fathers who have sole, split or joint custody arrangements, but I will just center my focus on those fathers who provide physical custody the majority of the time. Most single fathers receive custody through separation and divorce, but many of the issues I will be discussing hold equally true for widowers and adoptive fathers.

In order understand single fatherhood in America, I will first examine the statistics pertaining to single-parent families. The latest census bureau reports indicate that one-parent families now account for 21 percent of the 31.6 million families in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 1981). This is an increase of 3.4 million families or 111 percent since 1970. Correspondingly, nearly 12 out of 61 million children are living with their single parents. Approximately 90 percent of these children (10.5 million) live with their mothers while 10 percent (1.5 million) live with their fathers.

The numbers of children living with single custodial fathers increased 101 percent between 1970 and 1981. Fathers who live with their children, where no wife is present, account for 35 percent of all male householders in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 1981). Lewis (1978) speculates that the numbers

of children actually living with single fathers (3.5 million) is much higher than formal census bureau statistics (1.5 million) due to the large number of informal custody arrangements often made between parents and children. Future projections show an increase of almost seven million male-headed households by 1990, bringing the figures for families headed by single, widowed and divorced/separated spouse-absent males to 16 percent of the total households in America (twice the 1960 level) (Masnick and Bane, 1980).

Characteristics of Single Father Families

Since one of the purposes of this paper is to synthesize up-to-date knowledge concerning single-parent fathers, I will summarize what the literature reveals about these parents and their children. Some of the studies from which I will be drawing include the research of: Hanson (1979, 1980, 1981), Orthner, Brown and Ferguson (1976), Gasser and Taylor (1976), Mendes (1976a, 1976b), Levine (1977), Bartz & Witcher (1978), Rosenthal & Keshet (1981), Katz (1979), Chang and Deinard (1982), Defrain and Eirick (1981), Gersick (1979), Levine (1976), and Victor and Winkler (1977). Most investigations were descriptive in nature but they yielded some common themes that allow for generalizations useful for our understanding. Noteworthy is the fact that most of the research conducted on single fathers has evolved since 1976.

Size of sample. Very few single fathers have actually been studied. Most of the research reported had N's of 30 to 40 people and most have used personal interviews and/or questionnaires. Subjects were self-selected resulting in non-randomized samples. Dr. John DeFrain at the University of Nebraska is presently in the middle of analyzing data from one of the largest studies of single parents to date (N=738). An initial report of this work compared single mothers to single fathers, looked at different kinds of custody arrangements (sole, joint and split), and studied the adjustment of children to the divorce (Fricke, 1982).

Socioeconomic status (SES). Fathers who have custody of their children are generally better educated, occupy more prestigious occupational roles, and

receive higher income than fathers in the average two-parent household. The single fathers in the military may be the exception to this high SES. Although the exact monetary figures are not available, 50 percent of single-mother households were below poverty level in 1977 compared to 9 percent in male-headed households (Espenshade, 1979). Fathers many times receive custody because of their exceptionally good financial circumstances.

Race. Even though there was been a spectrum of racial representation in single-father samples, the majority of men appear to be caucasian. Statistics show that about one-half of black families with children were one-parent families compared to one-sixth of white families with children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). Additionally black one-parent families are more than likely than white one-parent families to be headed by mothers rather than fathers. Although the incidence of one-parent families is higher among blacks than whites, 68 percent of all families maintained by one parent in 1981 were white. The fact that the majority of single fathers are caucasion is not surprising since this is consistent with the higher SES levels for white males (minorities having been traditionally excluded from higher education, income and occupation).

Custody. There are three ways by which single-father custody takes place; death of spouse, adoption and separation/divorce. The numbers of widowers has remained constant in recent years and involved approximately 172,000 children in 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). Although the first single-father adoption did not take place until 1965, the Census Bureau reports that 75,000 father-custody children fall in this category of never married, which included formal (legal) or informal adoptive arrangements. The largest percent of single fathers receive custody of 1.1 million children through separation and divorce.[1] Some men have legal custody and others receive

[1]It should be pointed out that there are discrepancies between official and unofficial statistics due to the reporting mechanisms in this country.

their children through less formal means. Some fathers actively seek custody and the others assent to custody.

Religion. Very few studies reported the religious affiliations of single fathers and their families. Hanson (1979) found a cross section of religions, with the percent of catholic, protestant and jewish fathers proportionate to that of the general public.

Age. The chronological age of single fathers varies from young to middle age. Although there were some younger "modern and liberated" men in these samples, the majority of fathers were older and well established (Gersick, 1979; Hanson, 1979; Chang and Deinard, 1982). Apparently, men who are well into their professional careers are more likely to have the physical and emotional resources necessary to fight for, receive, and maintain custody.

Employment. Single fathers usually remain employed after becoming single parents, continuing their career patterns as before. Most fathers appear to have found a syncronization between their occupational and familial roles. Those who are engaged in more flexible occupations, change to more compatible jobs, or who are able to reallocate their time and priorities, experience smoother transition into their new single-parent roles (Mendes, 1976a, 1976b; Hanson, 1979). Gasser and Taylor (1976) and Chang and Deinard (1982) found that single fathers reported some curtailment in their job related travel, upward career mobility, and employment flexibility on account of their more restricted home circumstances, but this didn't present a psychological problem for most men.

Parental History. Several theories (social learning, identification, intergenerational continuity) suggest that mothers and fathers learn how to parent by modeling and identifying with their own sexed parent. Several investigators asked single fathers questions about their earlier parental history with their own parents.

Mendes (1975, 1976a, 1976b) found that single fathers who actively sought custody seemed to identify with and emulate their mothers (and not their fathers) as role models. In a comparative study between fathers with and without custody, Gersick (1979) reported that fathers with custody described more intense relationships with their mothers but felt distant from their fathers. Additionally, fathers with custody were more likely to have had mothers who were full time homemakers; they would have chosen their mothers rather than their fathers to live with, if the choice had had to be made when they were youngsters. Hanson (1979, 1980, 1981) reported that single fathers named their male parent (and not their mothers) as their primary parental model but most of the men felt they were much more emotionally affective and involved with their children than their own dads had been with them. In other words, these men made a conscientious effort to be expressive and physically affectionate with their children.

Homemaking skills. Not all single fathers were active in household activities (house cleaning, cooking, laundry, etc.) before becoming single parents. There is evidence, however, that most fathers experience little difficulty in taking on these additional duties (Gasser and Taylor, 1976; Mendes, 1975, 1976a, 1976b; Orthner, Brown and Ferguson, 1976; Victor and Winkler, 1977). In fact, contrary to common assumption, single fathers do not hire out or coerce relatives into taking on these responsibilities for them. Chang and Deinard (1982) reported that single fathers consistently reported themselves as having less difficulty with household and child-rearing responsibilities than they thought the "average" single father would have. So single fathers perceive that they are managing well. Most of the housekeeping chores are shared with children and when problems arise, it is in the area of time and energy for meal preparation and housecleaning. Similar problems exist in single-mother and two-working-parent households.

Motivation for custody. Although single fathers seek and/or receive custody for a number of reasons following separation, several researchers discerned between two distinct and different motivational origins. Gasser and Taylor (1976), Greene (1977), Hanson (1979, 1980, 1981), Mendes (1975, 1976a, 1976b), and Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) utilized a typology differentiating fathers who obtained custody by seeking it (adjudication) and fathers who assented to custody (allocation). One end of the spectrum implies active aggressiveness and the other end implies passiveness or even resistiveness. In the studies reported, fathers who actively seek custody adjust faster and better to their new roles, perform more adequately, and view themselves as more nurturing parents. Even though seekers spend more time initially in the parenting role, there is evidence that men who assent to custody also learn or adjust to their roles.

There is good reason to believe that fathers who have been involved in child care since early infancy, are more likely to actively seek custody and are better equipped both physically and emotionally to assume the primary care of their children. There was no indication that men who seek custody do so to spite their former wives or that men who have custody wish they did not. However, some custodial fathers felt their former spouses were equally fit to be custodial parents, and they, the fathers just happened to have custody at this time.

Chang and Deinard's recent study (1982) found that new single fathers sought custody because they saw themselves as better parents, because of their love for their children or because their wives didn't want the kids. Very few of the subjects in this investigation reported their former wives to be unfit for parenthood.

Visitation and child support. There is a variety of visitation arrangements with the noncustodial mothers, providing they are still around. Some single fathers report a good relationship between themselves and their former spouse around the visitation issue, but most fathers complain of some of the same problems that single mothers report about the noncustodial parent. That is, they don't spend enough time with the children, they don't show up when they are supposed to, the children return upset from visitation, they don't like their former spouses new friends (lifestyle, behavior), the children don't want to see them, they won't contribute anything to their welfare, etc. In a comparative study of single mothers and single fathers, Defrain and Eirick (1981) reported that single fathers are more likely to say negative things to their children about the noncustodial mother, than single mothers say about the noncustodial father. However, children in father custody homes are in more frequent contact with their noncustodial mothers than children in mother custody homes are with noncustodial fathers. (Santrock and Warshak, 1979).

There seems to be less of a battle between "you pay child support or you don't see the kids" in single-fathers homes than in single-mother homes. This may be primarily due to the fact that few mothers are paying child support and that single fathers are in a better financial situation than single mothers. Burden (1979) reported that 67 percent of noncustodial fathers were not paying child support after four years of divorce. Hanson (1979) reported that 90 percent of the noncustodial mothers were not paying child support. This difference may well be due to the overall discrepancy between men and women's education and salaries in our society.

Support systems. There is a growing recognition of the importance of strong social and kinship network system to provide emotional sustenance and promote healthy adjustment of parents and their children (Burden, 1979; Metcalf,

1980; Santrock and Warshak, 1979). Because of their sheer uniqueness, single fathers are supposed to conjure up more community sympathy and support. Common belief has it, that fathers are supposedly not as active as mothers in community organizations due to differences in the way that males and females are socialized. However, Santrock and Warshak (1979) found that not only are single fathers utilizing their extended family, professional, and community resources, but they were using them to a higher degree than single custodial mothers. Gasser and Taylor (1976) and Hanson (1979) found that single fathers got especially involved with support and community agencies for the period of time they were in crisis (pre and post divorce), but they relinquished and changed these associations over time. Single fathers appear to know other males in their circumstances, but they don't seem to seek companionship and support from other men; instead they turn to single mothers or single women for friendships. The availability of and the time to spend with suitable companions is a common complaint of single fathers.

Defrain and Eirick (1981) found that single fathers were less likely than single mothers to move from their home and community following divorce. This continuous stability in home environment probably enhances the adjustment of the single-father family. No doubt this phenomenon is due to the more stable economic capability men have following divorce in comparison to women in the same situation.

Children of Single Fathers

Most of the work reported to date on single-father families is on the men themselves and what they report about parenting and their children. A few studies collected data directly from the children themselves (Hanson, 1979, 1980, 1981; Santrock and Warshak, 1979; Ambert, 1982).

Sex and age of children. In 1980, the Census Bureau reported that 57 percent of father-only households had custody of boys, whereas 43 percent had girls. In contrast, single mothers had an equal split between male and female children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). The higher incidence of male children living with single fathers (Hanson, 1981; Chang and Deinard, 1982; Ambert, 1982) may be a factor in men's decision to seek custody and in judges decision to grant custody. Although single fathers may have custody of both boys and girls of all ages, the typical picture is this. Single mothers usually have custody of the younger children, both male and female. If fathers have custody it is more likely to be adolescent-aged children. They are also more prone to have teenage sons living with them since mothers more often retain custody of teenage daughters (Orthner and Lewis, 1979). However, about one-third of single fathers are rearing daughters that range in age from infancy to young adulthood. Men do not appear to have anxiety over raising daughters without their mothers, but the issue of sex education, appropriate clothing, and hair styles become concerns for which fathers seek help (Lynn, 1979).

For years, scholars have been concerned about the effect of parental absence on the sexual and social development of children. Most of the work in this area investigated the effects of father absence on boys. In one of the few studies comparing children from single-mother, single-father and two-parent homes, Santrock and Warshak (1979) investigated the interaction between the sex of the child(ren), the sex of the parents, the type of custody, and the social development of the children. They reported that children of single parents living with the same sex parent were better socially adjusted than children living with opposite sex parents.[3] That is, boys do better with fathers and girls are better

[3] It should be noted that the type of parenting style and the amount of contact with additional adult caretakers was also associated with the positive social behaviors shown by these children.

off with mothers. If these findings hold up over time, it may affect the way that custody decisions are made in the future.

Child care arrangement. Single fathers tend to rely on the same child care resources in the community as do all other parents including single mothers. Despite their more favorable economic position, these men do not hire housekeepers to come into the family home for child care. Neither do they rely or depend on relatives or friends to provide babysitting. Fathers with preschool children utilize nursery and day care centers, fathers with young school-age children paid neighbors to tend the children after school, and older children (age 10 and above) were usually left by themselves for short periods of time following school until the fathers came home (Lynn, 1979). Since single fathers tend not to be in frequent communication with each other, are less likely to exchange babysitting services (than single mothers), and are usually working outside the home, they may use child-related community facilities even more than custodial mothers.

Father-child relationships. The quality and quantity of the early interaction between father and child makes a difference in the way they get along in their present relationship. Single fathers who interacted frequently and effectively with children from very early infancy, adjusted more readily to single-parent roles (Orthner and Lewis, 1979; Gasser and Taylor, 1976), felt warmer and more comfortable with their custodial children (Lynn, 1979), were more likely to have sought custody, and they felt they were doing a good job (Mendes, 1975, 1976a, 1976b; Greene, 1977; Hanson 1979, 1980, 1981).

One of the common concerns expressed about men serving as primary custodians to young children, is their ability to provide emotional support and understanding, as well as physical and psychological nurturance. Hanson (1979, 1980, 1981) studied the relationship between single fathers and their children

with a focus on the nurturing quality of their interaction. On four separate measures, she found that fathers viewed themselves as affectionate nurturing parents, and children perceived their fathers as loving and concerned parents. Furthermore, fathers who sought custody viewed themselves more favorably than men who assented to custody. One of the interesting results of this study was the finding that children of single fathers reported their dads to be more nurturing than children rating either parent from two-parent families.

Smith and Smith (1981) were concerned about the ability of single fathers to meet the emotional requirements of children. Their study showed that single fathers do meet the emotional needs of children, appropriate to their age and sex. They also wrote that the problems that single fathers face, could be solved by the following strategies: (1) earlier preparation of men for parenthood, (2) more participation by men in household activities while still married, (3) increased involvement in the early discipline and limit setting of children, and (4) by learning to provide more nurturing supportive interaction with women and children early in the family's history.

Finally on the issue of parent-child relationships, Ambert (1982) studied children's behavior toward their custodial parents in one-parent families. When comparing children's behavior toward custodial mothers versus custodial fathers, she found that: (1) custodial fathers reported better child behavior toward them than did custodial mothers, and (2) the children of custodial fathers verbalized their appreciation for their fathers, but children of custodial mothers did so rarely. Hence, single fathers reported more satisfaction with their roles and children appeared to be happier in these households.

Implications for Social Policy

There is no organized family policy in the United States as there is in other European countries (Aldous and Dumond, 1980; Dempsey, 1981). In fact, there

is no clear cut definition that distinguishes between family policy, social policy and public policy. Zimmerman (1979) wrote that family policy is synonymous with social policy whereas family policy is only sometimes synonomous with public policy. That is, family policy is everything that the government does to and for families. Kamerman and Kahn (1978, p. 3) differentiated between explicit and implicit family policy. Explicit family policy are specific programs designed to achieve specified goals and/or policies which deliberately do things to and for the family such as day care, child welfare, income maintenance, etc. Implicit family policy are governmental actions not specifically or primarily addressed to the family but which have indirect consequences (e.g. decisions about road-building sites, immigration policy, industrial locations, etc.). I will not take the time here to debate if we should have organized family policy in America or what the difference is, if any, between public, social and family policy. Instead, I will attempt to enumerate the various areas in which we do or should have social policies that affect single-custodial fathers.

Custody laws and issues. Of all the issues that have ramifications for social policy pertaining to single fathers, the marriage and custody laws have been the most debated in recent years. The early 1970's saw the instigation of the no-fault divorce laws with individual states also amending their statutes governing the judicial award of child custody (Pearson and Theonnes, 1982). In 1973, the American Bar Association drafted a proposed Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act whereby the repeal of mother preference for custody began. Instead of the proscribed standards of maternal preference or fault, sex neutral standards, commonly called the best interests of the child doctrine, were instigated. By 1979, only 3 states were automatically awarding children to mothers by law (Burden, 1982).

Since it has become more feasible for men to obtain custody of minor children, more fathers are seeking these arrangements despite the discouragement they are getting from their lawyers (Bartz and Witcher, 1978). As stated earlier in this paper, 90 percent of custody cases go to the mother with 10 percent to fathers. Eighty percent of all custody decisions are undisputed. Of the 20 percent that are disputed, one-half are won by the father (Burden, 1982). With more fathers petitioning for divorce, custody disputes are also on the increase (Pearson and Thoennes, 1982).

In 1968, the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act was enacted to curb child snatching. Prior to this, frustrated fathers deprived of contact with their children, were kidnapping their own offspring at an estimated rate of 25,000 per year. These newer custody laws have curtailed parents from snatching in one state and gaining legal custody in another state, but they have not been the whole solution to the problem.

The hottest and most recent issue pertaining to custody is that of joint custody. In 1980, California enacted a law by which joint legal custody was seen to be in the best interest of the child. Recently an activist group, the Joint Custody Association, is calling for joint custody to be of first preference distinct and apart from sole custody. This new law would mandate joint PHYSICAL as well as joint legal custody to both parents except where a given parent doesn't want this arrangement or this arrangement is not in the best interest of the child.

Professionals from a variety of disciplines support the joint custody movement which is taking place right now. Studies indicate that children who are least adversely affected by divorce are those whose fathers continue to be actively involved (Burden, 1982), and fathers with joint custody continue their involve-

ment with children (Grief, 1978). Joint custody should reverse the menacing recourse by excluded parents to "child steal" and should reduce the incidence of abandonment and loss of financial support which is felt to be due to the lack of meaningful, frequent contact with children (Cook, 1980). These reasons for joint custody don't even address the larger issue of parents equal rights and access to their own children.

The American Bar Association, when writing the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act, also called for protection of children's right. Shouldn't there be a separate attorney or guardian ad litem appointed to represent the child's best interests when parents are in turmoil and both parents might be equally qualified to parent? How can children be protected in family conflicts when their parents are antagonists? Should the courts listen to input from all ages of children concerning their preference for the parent with which to live?

Questions and problems pertaining to child custody could go on and on. Suffice it to say that mandatory joint custody is on the horizon. This will in turn force our social and legal agencies into taking action on a whole number of other issues that effect single fathers.

Child Support. Child support and visitation are two of the most volatile issues for divorcing couples. Few fathers in the studies reported received child support payments from their former wives. This may be due to the discrepancy between men and women's salaries. Hanson (1979) reported 10 percent of noncustodial mothers paying child support. Burden (1979) reported 34 percent of noncustodial fathers paying child support after four years, while another study found that 47 percent of divorced female heads receive alimony and child support (Jenkins, 1978). The 1974 Amendments to the Social Security Act created a federal/state child-support enforcement program designed to catch up with fugitive fathers and assure children of their right to parental support (Jenkins, 1978).

Should such a program also be used to seek child support from fugitive but non-custodial working mothers? Should child support be mandated and vigorously enforced for parents of both sexes? If the ERA ever passes what are its implications for child support, spousal support (alimony) and a strict adherence to communal property settlement?

Income Support Program. Although single fathers enjoy higher socio-economic circumstances than single mothers (Burden, 1982), the large majority of single fathers remain on the job as before divorce with little choice as to whether or not they want to continue to work outside of the home. In our society, it is more acceptable for women with dependent children to make the choice between child care or outside employment. Most high SES men continue with present employment when they get custody, but I wonder how many lower SES men would choose to be custodial parents if they had the option of staying home with the children and drawing on AFDC or other forms of welfare. There is a strong stigma attached to able-bodied men tending house and caring for children when "they should be out working."

There are no income support programs for families in the U.S. beyond AFDC and unemployment. Moreover, today's welfare society has turned child-rearing into paid employment solely for women and has transformed children into sole providers for the family. Not only would I like to see a major welfare reform in this country with an income maintenance program and incentives to increase earning through lower taxes for all people, but this program should apply equally to men and women, single mothers and single fathers. Have you heard about social security for widows? How about social security for widowers.

Child Care. The problems that single fathers report concerning child care are not much different than problems that all single and two-working parent families have in obtaining quality but economical care for their children. The

research completed indicates that single fathers are not hiring live-in babysitters (as per myth) but are using the same resources that are available to all parents in the community. And these resources in the community have been under attack for years for their quantity, quality, cost and availability. In contrast to many other governments, our country just doesn't see the provision of child care within the jurisdiction of governmental policy. Efforts have been made since 1971 to pass legislation calling for comprehensive child care in the United States, but this legislation has been consistently vetoed or voted down. According to Kamerman and Kahn (1981), the United States has a "do nothing approach." They advocate that funds for child care be allocated to parents with financial needs and that low-cost loans be given to daycare centers for construction and renovation. Day care facilities need to be available for children after school and facilities need to extend their hours in order to accommodate working single fathers who have job requirements into the evening or weekend hours. Some countries even provide transportation between the school, the day care center and the child's home. Men may also need some assistance in the establishment of babysitting cooperatives. Actually, economical and quality child care is not just a single father issue; it is the nation's issue.

Family counseling, mediation and conciliation services. The problems that single fathers encounter during the separation and divorce process are not too much different from single mothers. This is a period of time that parental stress has the most negative effect on children. We as a nation could benefit by shoring up services provided by family courts early in the divorce process to assist with issues such as custody, visitation, and child support. Mediation and counseling services could help parents separate out their personal struggles from what might be in best interest of the child. Mediation could help avoid custody battles in the courtroom by hammering out divorce/custody compromises outside the courtroom.

Family caseworkers need assistance in what constitutes a systematic evaluation when they are assessing families and making decisions in disputed custody cases. Behavioral scientists could be serving as advisors to the courts as well as conducting clinics for pre- and post-divorce help.

If there was one consistent theme reported about single fathers, it was their fierce independence that they can do everything by themselves and they didn't need anyone. This stance coincides with the fact that single fathers were not inclined to seek help or services that might be available. However, single fathers who are granted custody do need support and follow-up for such issues as parenting, personal adjustment and role changes.

Community Program Development. There are a number of community programs that would be of interest and assistance to single-custodial fathers. Single parent support groups have become popular with women's groups but there are few such groups for single-custodial or noncustodial fathers. There would be benefit in mixing single mothers and single fathers in these self-help groups which could be sponsored and funded by local agencies. Special classes could be offered to dads who need and want to learn more about "how to parent," children's growth and development, and children's emotional lives. Single fathers have expressed interest in understanding and helping their pre-teen and teenage daughters in their sexual-social development (Hanson, 1981). How about a more active BIG SISTERS program? Although many men reported social isolation, few were actively seeking each other out. Classes for information and support would put single fathers in touch with each other and would provide social networks. My plea would be that single fathers be plugged into some of the ongoing programs in the community and this may take some active recruitment on the part of professionals working in these areas.

Business and Industry. What is the responsibility of business and industry to single fathers or fathers in general? What are the rules, regulations and policies of businesses and how can they be helpful? Sweden adopted a paternal leave policy for the purpose of encouraging early bonding and participation of men in child care. I would like to see industries in America do something similar. Hanson's research (1979) showed that single fathers who were doing well as single parents, reported early involvement in the lives of their children, so this appears to be an important issue.

Businesses and organizations of all kinds could incorporate flexitime into their schema where single fathers could adjust their hours according to their families needs. Dempsey (1981) suggested a written "Family Responsibility Statement" by organizations so that prospective employees could decide if the organization requirements were compatible with their desired family style. How about the adoption of a family sick leave policy where a parent can stay home with sick children and not use their own sick leave time?

A few companies provide day care in their setting but this could be further encouraged. How about bringing children to work or holding joint family and work group meetings?

The banking and housing industry could make some adjustments. There are a number of single fathers who would like to buy homes together and share in the cost benefits and satisfaction that such arrangements provide. Thus far, under our present loan and ownership policies, this kind of arrangements has been most difficult. There is also recent interest in multiple family dwellings built specifically for single parent families, where families can share common core facilities but maintain their privacy.

As a working parent, have you every tried to bank in the evening or taken care of a problem with your utilities. In the town I live in (population =

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250,000) most of the businesses aren't even open on the weekends. We are still basically a society geared to the traditional nuclear family where the nonworking mother can take care of family business during the day. Undoubtedly, industries need to review their policies to make sure that they are not discriminatory in preference for men or women and that equal opportunities exist for people of both sexes as well as all marital statuses.

School System. A recent study indicated that children in single-parent families do poorly in school and despite the fact that the study design and interpretation were scewed, this article received a lot of press (NAESP, 1980; Nuta, 1981). Both the public and private schools need to be continually vigilant about the negative image they project toward children in single-parent families. Teachers need to make sure that these children are not singled out as "trouble children" perpetuating and reinforcing the old stereotypes.

Parenting classes should be a requirement of all children graduating from the school system. Despite the fact that the majority of Americans become parents, there is little to no education provided that assists people in this endeavor. This is especially true for men in our society. With so many men becoming the primary parents in single-custodial homes, this is more important than ever.

Health Care System. Although no study has been done on the health or health seeking behaviors of single father families, I would suspect that their problems are no different than other families with similar socioeconomic resources. Single fathers like all Americans could benefit by a quality health care system that is available to all people despite their financial means. Additionally, health care services are just not available for working parents, unless they take time during the day. Not only does this require a half-day's time for a simple doctors appointment, but is very costly. Free or inexpensive clinics could be

established and opened during hours when single parents with children could get there and this is usually in the evenings or on the weekends. Additionally, a focus on preventive health care should be encouraged by our insurance industry. Many people take their children into costly emergency rooms because their insurance policies won't pay for ordinary doctors office visits.

The critical point in relationship to health and single fatherhood, is the need for a large scale federal or state health program for families of all means, which would give fathers and their children equal access to their right to good health.

Cultural Message. We need to and are examining the ways we socialize males in our society. I would like to see more study and discussion about changing roles of men in a fashion similar to that held last spring at the Groves Conference. All of us could help men change the macho image some uphold for alternative images and roles. This is easier said than done, of course, but men could support each other in this endeavor and lend assistance to men who are pursuing nurturing roles (e.g., fathering, nursing, teachers of children, etc.) Quite frankly, women do not always allow men room for change and often reinforce and want the traditional behaviors to continue. Times are changing as Robert Lewis's book, CHANGING ROLES FOR MEN indicates, but the movement is slow.

The last implication for social policy that I will mention is the need for more support for research and the concurrent upgrading of the quality and quantity of research on single-custodial fathers. Most of the samples of single-father families have been small, most come from nonprobability samples, and most studies were exploratory or descriptive in nature. I would like to see more sophisticated designs and statistics being used to answer some of the tough

issues we have ahead. A few questions to be asked and researched at this point include:

1. Only successful single fathers appear in studies. Who are the unsuccessful single fathers and what is their story?
2. What are the long term effects of joint custody on children and on both parents?
3. Does early involvement of fathers with children increase the quality of fathering or single fathering in later years?
4. What are the effects of father-only presence? That is, the corollary of father-absence studies, but now mother-absence.

Conclusion. The implications that social policy has for single-custodial-father homes is similar to but different than that for single-custodial-mother homes. I have taken a few points that were highlighted as needs from the Whitehouse Conference report and applied them to the special case of single-father families. Despite the fact that America has a "do nothing" approach in relationship to family policy, there are some things that can be done to assist existing and future single fathers and I've attempted to enumerate some of them.

The incidence of father-only families is increasing. As stated before, male-only headed households will continue to increase through 1990 (Masnick and Bare, 1980). Not only will we see more fathers as single parents, but they may well be the best choice of parent for children in many single-parent families.

There are some women in this country who are concerned that the preference of mother custody is changing to favor male custody (Burden, 1982). This concern is based on the fact that men are in better financial circumstances and/or remarry faster. Therefore, judges look upon them with more favor.

I'm not sure I agree with this fear. But, I do know that males for one reason or the other have been short-changed in terms of their parenting roles. I am glad that single-custodial fathers now represent an acceptable and viable option for American family life.

#44G

Single Custodial Fathers: Implications for Social Policy

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